

Rowena Track, President and CEO
Boys & Girls Club of Stamford

H.B. 6659 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR
THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2025, AND MAKING
APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

Appropriations Committee
February 23, 2023

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Exum,
Representative Paris, Senator Berthel and Representative Nuccio.

I am writing in support of H.B. 6659, which includes appropriations to continue the support of the Neighborhood Youth Center Grant program. However, we would like the Committee to consider increasing the Governor's budget for the Neighborhood Youth Center line item from \$613,866 to \$1,000,000.

Boys & Girls Clubs across Connecticut have benefited from the Neighborhood Youth Center grant program to support school-age, at-risk youth through academic enrichment, mentoring, prevention services, and skill-building programs. Since the pandemic, Boys & Girls Clubs have seen an increase in the need for services in communities across the state and have increased our statewide footprint, focused on serving more youth and expanding programming services to engage more teens.

At Boy & Girls Club of Stamford, we serve nearly 1,700 children to teens, ages 6-19 annually, offering programs and services that enhance their development. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, we currently serve 500 youth at our two locations daily. Our multidisciplinary approach to programming ensures there is something for everyone at BGCS. Our core program areas include Character & Leadership Development, Education & Enrichment, Workforce Development, and Athletics & Well-Being.

BGCS offers programs that would attract and grow our teen membership base, and with our 16,000-square-foot Teen Center addition, we are poised to do just that. Culinary Capers teaches youth kitchen safety, sanitation, food preparation, and food production. Youth will develop culinary skills and cook healthy meals each week in our commercial kitchen. The program introduces basic culinary skills to 6th, 7th, and 8th-grade club youth. Then, the 9th through 12th-grade teens are enrolled in the formal 12-week curriculum course. Finally, participants will receive study materials and support to obtain the ServeSafe Food Handler Certification and summer employment. The overarching goal of this program is to give youth tangible and marketable skills, which could ultimately lead to employment or encourage enrollment in a formal Culinary Arts program post-graduation.

Our new BGCS teen program, Future Ready, targets youth in grades 7-12 at elevated risk of academic failure and ancillary negative indicators and outcomes such as substance use, depression, behavioral and socioemotional challenges, potential incarceration, and eventually physical health problems. Funding through the Neighborhood Youth Center grant assists in enabling BGCS to expand this critically important program by serving more significant numbers of teens and undertaking strategic growth, including innovative workforce development programs, increased SEL and mental health resources, and building on the already strong foundation of our existing teen programs.

Boys & Girls Clubs provide a safe place to go afterschool and in the summer. Clubs relentlessly focus on the conditions necessary for youth to learn, grow and thrive. Because of this, outcomes data from Clubs affirm that Club youth graduate with a plan for the future, become leaders and change agents and make decisions that promote their health and wellness.

BGCS is committed to closing the achievement gap among our club members who attend Stamford Public School. Our cornerstone education program, Project Learn, has had a long track record of success. The Club conducts an annual evaluation to assess the quality and effectiveness of all programs and uses program data to make changes or improvements to the program. Some of our impact educational measures for the last academic school year included:

- providing 954 youth with Project Learn educational enrichment programming
- providing over 4,000 hours of homework help
- providing approximately 2,000 hours of STEM-related programming

We offer other variety of both formal and informal enrichment programs. Other BGCA-approved programs that our club facilitates are:

- Diplomas 2 Degrees: this college readiness program provides a range of services to guide Club members as they work toward high school graduation and prepare for post-secondary education and career success.
- Triple Play: features three components: Healthy Habits engages youth in nutrition education and cooking activities. Recreation activities help youth build cooperation, sportsmanship, and conflict resolution skills while enjoying games together.
- Keystone Club: affords teens an opportunity to gain valuable leadership and service experience. They conduct activities in three areas: academic success, career exploration, and community service.

The Boys & Girls Club of Stamford receives Neighborhood Youth Center funds through the Connecticut Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs (the Alliance), a statewide entity serving all Boys & Girls Clubs in Connecticut. The Alliance consists of 15 Club Organizations operating 50 Club sites and collectively serves 25,000 youth in 22 towns and cities. Through the Neighborhood Youth Center Grant, Clubs partner with

the Alliance to consistently implement programs designed to help youth close the academic achievement gap, make positive decisions and develop future leaders. This program enables Clubs to extend and reinforce what is being taught in school.

An investment in the Neighborhood Youth Center grant program is an investment in the Boys & Girls Clubs. A 2015 study by the Institute for Social Research and the School of Public Health at the University of Michigan found that for every \$1 invested in a Boys & Girls Club, \$9.60 in economic benefits are returned to the individual and society. Please consider supporting an increase in Neighborhood Youth Center grant program and let's continue in our mission of building "Great Futures" for the youth of Connecticut.